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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1981, a survey of the Class of 1976 was conducted to gather information about both what the students had done since completing high school and their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their high school program. Generally, courses in all areas were rated as satisfactory or excellent, with music receiving especially high marks and mathematics the lowest marks. Students mentioned study skills as an area in which they felt they needed additional preparation. Ninety-one percent of the students reported that they were currently working, mainly in professional and technical jobs and felt that their high school program helped them to develop appropriate work habits and attitudes toward work. The data show that post-high school work experience generally reflected the course of study undertaken while in high school. Regarding postsecondary education, 73 percent reported having attended a college, trade, business, or vocational school since graduation, and 38 percent reported having completed a post-high school course of study. Counseling services appear to have been a problem; of special concern was the lack of information about financial aid available and the reputation of schools and colleges in the student areas of interest. (PN)

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Survey of the Damascus High School Class of 1976

November, 1982

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Superintendent of Schools

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

SURVEY OF THE DAMASCUS HIGH SCHOOL

Class of 1976

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SURVEY OF THE DAMASCUS HIGH SCHOOL
Class of 1976

In the fall of 1981, the principal of Damascus High School contacted the Department of Educational Accountability and requested assistance in conducting a survey of the Class of 1976. The aim of the follow-up survey was to gather information about both what the students have done since completing high school and their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their high school program. The study concentrated on four specific areas. These were the following:

- Posthigh school work experiences
- Posthigh school education
- Quality of courses at Damascus High School
- Quality of the counseling at Damascus High School

The survey results suggest that in many areas the graduates of the Class of 1976 at Damascus High School look back very favorably on their school experience during 1972-76 and the general preparation provided them for later schooling and work. Generally, courses in all areas were rated as satisfactory or excellent, with music receiving especially high marks and mathematics the lowest marks. Given the opportunity to name an area in which they found they needed additional preparation, students mentioned study skills with the greatest frequency (27%).

A large proportion of the sample report that they are currently working (91%), mainly in professional and technical jobs and feel that their high school program helped them to develop appropriate work habits and attitudes toward work. Most (74%) report, however, that their jobs were not a specific result of training they had received in high school.

The data show that posthigh school work experience generally reflected the course of study undertaken while in high school. Sixty-four percent of the those who took general education courses reported working in jobs classified as technical, clerical, or sales; 55 percent of those who took college preparatory courses reported working in jobs classified as professional; and 69 percent of those who took vocational courses reported jobs classified as clerical, craftsman, operative, or technical.

The record of the class regarding postsecondary education is not overly encouraging. While 73 percent report having attended a college, trade, business, or vocational school since graduation, 38 percent report having completed a posthigh school course of study.

Finally, counseling appears definitely to have been a problem. Counseling received at most a moderate endorsement both where specific aspects of counseling were directly probed and where general comments about the school's strengths and weaknesses were sought. Comparing the ratings of courses with counseling services clearly shows that counseling was seen as less satisfactory. Of special concern was the lack of information about financial aid available and the reputation of schools and colleges in the student areas of interest. Information on postsecondary schools in Maryland, the high school course of study needed to qualify for various jobs, and college majors were rated most favorably.

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SURVEY OF THE DAMASCUS HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1976

BACKGROUND

In the fall of 1981, the principal of Damascus High School contacted the Department of Educational Accountability and requested assistance in conducting a survey of the Class of 1976. The aim of the follow-up survey was to gather information about both what the students have done since completing high school and their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their high school program. The study concentrated on four specific areas. These were the following:

- Posthigh school work experiences
- Posthigh school education
- Quality of courses at Damascus High School
- Quality of the counseling at Damascus High School

Using address data provided by Damascus High School files and members of the Class of 1976, questionnaires were sent to graduates in mid-December of 1981.[1] A follow-up was sent to nonrespondents two months later. A total of 106 graduates, or 45 percent of the class, completed and returned their questionnaires. To assess the representativeness of this respondent sample, comparisons were made between it and the total graduating class. Factors considered[2] were sex of student and predominant high school course of study. Exhibit 1 presents these comparisons.

1. Addresses were found for 238 students, 96 percent of the 1976 graduating class. However, it is probable that some of these were not accurate.
2. These data were chosen because of the relevance and because they were readily available in MCPS records.

EXHIBIT 1

Comparison of the Characteristics of the
Respondent Sample With the Total Class of 1976

	Course of Study								
	General Education			College Preparatory			Vocational Education		
	Percentage								
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Respondent Sample (N=106)	12	20	32	14	28	42	9	16	25
Class of 1976 (N=212)*	17	18	35	16	18	34	15	16	31

*This sample actually includes less than the total number of graduates in the Class of 1976 because data were missing on 36 persons.

When the respondent sample is compared to the total sample, the data show that overall a significant difference in distributions of students exists.[3] Specifically, the respondent sample contains proportionately more students who took college preparatory courses and fewer who took vocational courses than the class of 1976. This is largely because females, especially females who took college preparatory courses, are overrepresented in the respondent group.

The respondent group is, thus, not totally representative of the Class of 1976, and these differences in composition of the sample and population must be kept in mind in examining the study findings and drawing inferences from them.

3. A chi-square test was used to determine whether or not the distributions of students were significantly different than what would be expected by chance. The resultant statistic $X^2 = 58.1$ is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

OVERVIEW OF SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey results suggest that in many areas the graduates of the Class of 1976 at Damascus High School look back very favorably on their school experience during 1972-76 and the general preparation provided them for later schooling and work. Generally, courses in all areas were rated as satisfactory or excellent, with music receiving especially high marks and mathematics the lowest marks. Given the opportunity to name an area in which they found they needed additional preparation, students mentioned study skills with the greatest frequency (27%).

A large proportion of the sample report that they are currently working (91%), mainly in professional and technical jobs and feel that their high school program helped them to develop appropriate work habits and attitudes toward work. Most (74%) report, however, that their jobs were not a specific result of training they had received in high school.

The data show that posthigh school work experience generally reflected the course of study undertaken while in high school. Sixty-four percent of the those who took general education courses reported working in jobs classified as technical, clerical, or sales; 55 percent of those who took college preparatory courses reported working in jobs classified as professional; and 69 percent of those who took vocational courses reported jobs classified as clerical, craftsman, operative, or technical.

The record of the class regarding postsecondary education is not overly encouraging. While 73 percent report having attended a college, trade, business, or vocational school since graduation, 38 percent report having completed a posthigh school course of study.

Finally, counseling appears definitely to have been a problem. Counseling received at most a moderate endorsement both where specific aspects of counseling were directly probed and where general comments about the school's strengths and weaknesses were sought. Comparing the ratings of courses with counseling services clearly shows that counseling was seen as less satisfactory. Of special concern was the lack of information about financial aid available and the reputation of schools and colleges in the student areas of interest. Information on postsecondary schools in Maryland, the high school course of study needed to qualify for various jobs, and college majors were rated most favorably.

DETAILED FINDINGS

POSTHIGH SCHOOL WORK EXPERIENCE

One of the aims of this study was to examine the employment experiences of the Class of 1976 since graduation. Judging from the survey respondents, the students have been quite successful in gaining employment and feel the general preparation they received in high school was useful. However, less than a third of the students felt that their jobs were the result of specific training received in high school. Specifically, the study found the following:

- The vast majority of the respondents (97%) report working at paid full- or part-time jobs since completing high school. About 91 percent of them are presently employed. Significant differences ($p < .05$) in employment as a function of sex were also found, with males being more likely to be currently employed than females (97% vs. 71%). Further, 86 percent of the class reported they had held no more than three different full-time jobs since leaving high school.

- Nearly 50 percent of the respondents presently have jobs which can be classified as professional or technical.[4] Exhibit 2 presents information about the type of jobs currently being held by the respondents.

- Female respondents tend to be involved most heavily in professional, clerical, technical, or sales jobs. Eighty-six percent of the females reported working in these fields. Male respondents were most heavily involved in jobs categorized as technical, professional, labor, craftsman, or sales (76%). (Exhibit 3 presents these findings.)

- The data show that posthigh school work experience generally reflected the course of study undertaken while in high school. Sixty-four percent of the those who took general education courses reported working in jobs classified as technical, clerical, or sales; 55 percent of those who took college preparatory courses reported working in professional jobs; and 69 percent of those who took vocational courses were working in clerical, craftsman, operative, or technical jobs. (Exhibit 4 presents these findings.)

- Overall, 26 percent of the respondents reported that their jobs were a result of specific training they had received in high school. However, there were significant differences as a function of sex and high school course of study. That is, females and vocational education students were more likely to state that their jobs were a result of training they received in high school than males and students following other courses of study. (Exhibit 5 presents these findings.) In contrast, 76 percent of the sample reported that their high school experiences helped them in developing good work habits and attitudes toward work.

4. Appendix A presents the schema used in classifying jobs.

EXHIBIT 2

Types Of Jobs Presently Held by the Respondents

Type of Job	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Each Type Of Employment N=74
Professional	28
Technical	20
Clerical	14
Sales	11
Laborer	5
Craftsman	4
Manager	4
Protective Services	4
Operative	3
Service	3
Homemaker	1
Military	1
Owner	1
Farmer	0

EXHIBIT 3

Types Of Jobs Presently Held By Males and Females

Type of Job	Percentage of Males Reporting Each Type Of Employment (N=37)	Percentage of Females Reporting Each Type Of Employment (N=59)
Technical	24	17
Professional	16	36
Laborer	14	-
Craftsman	11	-
Sales	11	12
Protective Services	8	2
Manager	5	3
Operative	5	2
Military	3	-
Owner	3	-
Clerical	-	22
Service	-	5
Homemaker	-	2

EXHIBIT 4

Type Of Job Presently Held by Students Pursuing
Different Courses of Study in High School

Type of Job	General Education N=30	College Preparatory N=44	Vocational N=22
Technical	30	16	14
Clerical	17	5	27
Sales	17	11	5
Laborer	10	-	9
Professional	7	55	5
Service	7	-	5
Craftsman	3	-	14
Manager	3	5	5
Military	3	-	-
Protective Services	3	7	-
Homemaker	-	2	-
Operative	-	-	14
Owner	-	-	5

EXHIBIT 5

Percentage of Students Reporting Their Jobs To Be a Result of
Specific Training Received in High School
By Course of Study and Sex

	Percentage N=106
General Education*	
Male**	8
Female	43
College Preparatory	
Male	7
Female	17
Vocational	
Male	20
Female	59

*Differences between course of study significant at $p < .05$.
**Differences between males and females significant at $p < .01$.

POSTHIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

The second area of special focus was the additional education the students of 1976 had obtained after high school. The data show that while nearly three-fourths of the students attended some sort of postsecondary school, less than 38 percent completed their course of study. While we do not have data against which to compare these numbers, this completion rate seems low and is some cause for concern. Specifically, the data show the following:

- Seventy-three percent of the graduates reported having attended a college, trade, business, or vocational school since graduating from high school. As would be expected, those who had taken general education and college preparatory courses were significantly more likely to do so than those who had selected vocational preparation ($p < .01$). Specifically, 18 percent report having attended a business, trade, or vocational school; 30 percent report attending a junior college; and 35 percent report attending a four-year college. In addition, 7 percent report attending a graduate school. Twenty-two percent of the class are still in school.

- Of those electing to continue their education after high school, approximately half (53%) completed their posthigh school course of study.[5] The most frequently mentioned explanation for failing to complete school and attain a degree was an offer of an attractive job at a time when the student was tired of school. A change of majors or reevaluation of goals and marriage also were mentioned with some frequency. Interestingly, financial problems were not mentioned with any great frequency. Exhibit 6 presents the reasons cited by male and female students for leaving school before graduation.

- Fourty-nine college degrees or certificates of training were reported as earned by the respondents. Eight percent of these were certificates; 18 percent were associates of arts degrees; and 69 percent were bachelor's degrees. There is not sufficient data to identify the remaining 5 percent of the degrees reported. As one might expect, the students who took a college preparatory course in high school were significantly ($p < .01$) more likely to report earning degrees than general education or vocational students (85% vs 13% and 2%). The most popular field for continuing education was business. Exhibit 7 presents additional information on the areas in which degrees were earned by the respondents.

5. This corresponds to the 38 percent of the respondent sample cited above as completing their posthigh school course of study.

EXHIBIT 6

Reasons for Leaving School Before Completing A Degree

Reason	% of Males (N=13)	Reason	% of Females (N=14)
Job Opportunity	38	Marriage	36
Change of Majors	31	Job Opportunity	21
Marriage	7	Inadequate Courses	21
Military	7	Change of Majors	14
School Climate	7	Family Problems	4
Financial Problems	7	Financial Problems	0
Inadequate Courses	0	School Climate	0
Family Problems	0	Military	0

EXHIBIT 7

Fields in Which Degrees or Certificates Earned

	Field	Number Reporting A Degree or Certificate
1.	Business	10
2.	Engineering	4
	Psychology, Sociology	4
3.	Education	3
	P.E. Recreation	3
	Science	3
	Union Skills	3
4.	Anthropology, Archaeology	2
	Art, Music	2
	Math	2
	Medicine	2
	Social Studies	2
	Social Work	2
5.	Child Care	1
	Computer	1
	English	1
	Foreign Language	1
	Law Enforcement	1
	Liberal Arts	1
	Philosophy	1

QUALITY OF ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Another important purpose of the study was to gather the graduates' opinions of the quality of the courses provided to them at Damascus High School. Overall, the courses offered received good ratings, and the majority of students felt they had been well prepared. However, some important content areas such as mathematics and science received the lowest rankings. Instruction in these areas should be examined to see whether or not changes should be made. Specifically, the data show the following:

- Students' ratings of courses taken at Damascus High School indicated that on the whole they appear to be fairly satisfied. However, some statistically significant differences in ratings as a function of course are found, with music being rated highest and mathematics lowest. (Exhibit 8)

- Few differences were found as a function of sex of student or course of study. Males rated industrial arts and social studies significantly ($p < .05$) higher than females (2.3 v 2.1). Students who had taken college preparatory courses (2.4) rated English higher than students in general (2.2) or vocational education (1.8) courses ($p < .01$).

- Only about half of the respondents (52%) said they would follow their same course of study if they could repeat their high school program. A variety of suggestions were offered by students concerning what they would do differently. Generally, these indicated that the students felt that they would work harder and take more courses in their area of interest than they had originally done.

EXHIBIT 8

Overall Ratings of Quality of Courses Taken*

	Course	Rating
A**	Music	2.4
B	Industrial Arts	2.3
	Art	2.3
C	English	2.2
	Social Studies	2.1
	Science	2.1
	Foreign Language	2.1
	Business	2.1
	Home Economics	2.1
	Mathematics	2.0

*The respondents were asked to rate the counseling help he had received on a scale of 1 = Not Helpful to 3 = Very Helpful.

**Differences between rating of items on Groups A, B, and C are significant at the .05 level.

- Forty-five students took advantage of the opportunity to name the areas in which they found they had needed additional preparation. A variety of responses was given with the most frequently mentioned being that of study skills (27%). (See Exhibit 9)

EXHIBIT 9

What Additional Preparation Did You Need?
(N=45)

	Area	Percentage of Respondents Mentioning the Area
1.	Study Skills	27
2.	English	18
	Math	18
3.	Industrial Arts	16
	Science	16
4.	Harder Work	11
5.	Better Counseling	7
	More College Prep Courses	7
6.	Business	4
	Computer Training	4
7.	Foreign Language	2
8.	Better Teachers	2
9.	More Responsibility and Discipline	2
10.	Medical Training	2

- Only 71 percent of the survey participants responded to the question of whether or not their high school program of studies had prepared them for their posthigh school coursework.[6] Of those responding to this question, 33 percent replied negatively. No differences were found by sex or high school course of study.

- The respondents also were given the opportunity to identify the areas of their high school program which they considered most useful and most in need of improvement. Seventy-five percent of those who returned a questionnaire named an area as most useful, and 84 percent identified an area as needing improvement. No consistent theme emerged from these responses. For information, however, Appendix B presents a detailed accounting of these responses.

6. This probably reflects the fact that only 73 percent did, in fact, pursue additional course work after high school. Understandably, response rates differed sharply by high school course of study. Only 71 percent of the general and 26 percent of the vocational students answered this question, whereas 98 percent of college preparatory students responded.

QUALITY OF COUNSELING HELP

The final area explored was the graduates' opinions of the counseling aid provided to them at Damascus High School. Their opinions of the preparation they received with regard to both the vocational and academic areas were sought. Overall, counseling services received only a moderate endorsement; and it is clear that there is room for improvement in this area. Specifically, the findings show the following:

- Overall students felt the counseling help they received at Damascus High School was somewhat helpful. Exhibit 10 presents their ratings of help provided in seven different areas. They were most satisfied with the information they received regarding "the high school program of study to take to qualify for certain jobs or college majors." They were least satisfied with the information they received on postsecondary financial aid available to them and on schools' reputations in their field of interest.

- On the whole, the male and female students had similar opinions of the counseling they were given. Only in one area--the importance of a school's reputation in the field of the student's interest--was a significant difference found, with males being more satisfied than females (1.9 v 1.6, $p < .01$).

- Generally, counseling was evaluated similarly by students who had taken the different courses of study. However, students who had taken the college preparatory courses gave higher ratings (2.3) to the counseling they received regarding the high school program needed to qualify for jobs or college majors than students taking general education (2.0) or vocational education (1.9) courses ($p < .05$).

434p/75

EXHIBIT 10

Overall Ratings of Counseling Help Received*

	Topic	Rating
A**	Schools in Maryland	2.2
	Program Information	2.1
B	Schools Outside of Maryland	1.9
	Job Information	1.9
	Variety of Schools	1.9
C	School Reputation	1.7
	Financial Aid Information	1.6

*The respondents were asked to rate the counseling help he had received on a scale of 1 = Not Helpful to 3 = Very Helpful.

**Differences between rating of items in groups A, B, and C are significant at the .05 level.

434p

APPENDIX A

EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES

1. Clerical (e.g., bankteller, bookkeeper, typist, mail carrier)
2. Craftsman (e.g., baker, mechanic, machinist, painter, plumber)
3. Farmer or Farm Manager
4. Homemaker or Housewife
5. Laborer (e.g., construction worker, car washer, sanitary worker)
6. Manager, Administrator (e.g., school administrator, sales manager)
7. Military (e.g., career officer, enlisted man or woman)
8. Operative (e.g., McDonald's, gas stations attendant, bus driver)
9. Professional (e.g., accountant, nurse, engineer, athlete, teacher)
10. Proprietor or Owner (e.g., contractor, small business)
11. Protective Service (e.g., policeman, fireman, detective, sheriff)
12. Sales (e.g., sales clerk, real estate agent, salesperson)
13. Technical (e.g., draftsman, dental technician, programmer)
14. Service (e.g., barber, beautician, baby-sitter, lifeguard, waiter)

EXHIBIT B-1

What Area Has Been Most Useful?
By Percentage

General N=28		College N=40		Vocational N=21	
1. Ind. Arts	20	1. English	23	1. Business	29
2. English	16	2. College Prep	20	2. Industrial Arts	24
3. Business	14	3. Responsibility	13	3. Math	14
4. Science	11	4. Math	10	4. Foreign Lang.	10
5. Art/Music	11	5. Science	10	5. English	10
6. Responsibility	7	6. Teachers	10	6. Social Studies	5
7. Math	4	7. Business	5	7. Responsibility	5
8. Variety of Courses	4	8. Art/Music	3	8. Variety of Courses	5
9. Foreign Lang.	3				
10. Industrial Arts	3				
11. Counseling	3				

EXHIBIT B-2

What Area Is Most in Need of Improvement?
By Percentage

General N=25		College N=37		Vocational N=18	
1. Industrial Arts	20	1. Counseling	24	1. English	17
2. English	16	2. Work too easy	20	2. Ind. Arts	17
3. Business	12	3. Math	16	3. Math	17
4. Art/Music	12	4. English	8	4. Counseling	17
5. Math	12	5. Science	5	5. Variety of Courses	11
6. Social Studies	12	6. More Responsibility	5	6. Business	6
7. Counseling	8	7. Study Skills	5	7. Study Skills	6
8. Work Too Easy	8	8. Variety of Courses	5		
9. Foreign Language	4	9. Business	3		
10. More Responsibility and Discipline	4	10. Industrial Arts	3		

434p/75